

A MATTER OF BUSINESS

BY SINCLAIR LEWIS

Author of Main Street

CANDEE'S sleeping porch faced the east. At sunrise every morning he startled awake and became a poet.

He yawned, pulled up the gray camping blanket which proved that he had once gone hunting in Canada, poked both hands behind his neck, settled down with a wriggling motion, and was exceedingly melancholy and happy.

He resolved, seriously and all at once, to study music, to wear a rose down to business, to tell the truth in his advertisements, and to start a campaign for a municipal auditorium. He longed to leap out of bed and go change the entire world immediately. But always, as sunrise blurred into russet, he plunged his arms under the blanket, sighed, "Funny what stuff a fellow will think of at six a.m.," yawned horridly, and was asleep. Two hours afterward, when he sat on the edge of the bed, rubbing his jaw in the hope that he could sneak out of shaving this morning, letting his feet ramble around independently in search of his slippers, he was not a poet. He was Mr. Candee of the Novelty Stationery Shop, Vernon.

He sold writing paper, Easter cards, bronze book-ends, framed color prints. He was a salesman born. To him it was exhilaration to herd a hesitating customer; it was pride to see his clerks, Miss Cogerty and the new girl, imitate his courtesy, his quickness. He was conscious of beauty. Ten times a week he stopped to gloat over a print in which a hilltop and a flare of daisies expressed all the indolence of August. But—and this was equally a part of him—he was delighted by "putting things over." He was as likely to speculate in a broken lot of china dogs as to select a stock of

chaste brass knockers. It was he who had popularized Whistler in Vernon, and he who had brought out the "Oh My! Bathing Girl," pictures.

He was a soldier of fortune, was Candee; he fought under any flag which gave him the excuse. He was as much an adventurer as though he sat on a rampart wearing a steel corselet instead of sitting at a golden-oak desk wearing a blue-serge suit.

Every Sunday afternoon the Candees drove out to the golf club. They came home by a new route this Sunday.

"I feel powerful. Let's do some exploring," said Candee.

He turned the car off the Boulevard, down one of the nameless hilly roads which twist along the edge of every city. He came into a straggly country of market gardens, jungles of dead weeds, unpruned crab-apple trees, and tall, thin houses which started as artificial-stone mansions and ended as unpainted frame shacks. In front of a tar-paper shanty there was a wild-grape arbor of thick vines draped upon second-hand scantlings and cracked pieces of molding. The yard had probably never been raked, but it displayed petunias in a tub salvaged from a patent washing machine. On a shelf beside the gate was a glass case with a sign:

TOYS FOR THREE CHILRUN.

Candee stopped the car.

In the case were half a dozen wooden dolls with pegged joints—an old-man doll with pointed hat, jutting black beard, and lumpy, out-thrust hands; a Pierrot with a prim wooden cockade; a princess fantastically tall and lean.

"Huh! Hand made! Arts-and-grafts stuff!" said Candee, righteously.

"That's so," said Mrs. Candee.

He drove on.

"Freak stuff. Abs'lutely grotesque. Not like anything I ever saw!"

"That's so," said Mrs. Candee.

He was silent. He irritably worked the air-choke, and when he found that it was loose he said, "Damn!" As for Mrs. Candee, she said nothing at all. She merely looked like a wife.

He turned toward her argumentatively. "Strikes me those dolls were darn ugly. Some old nut of a hermit must have made 'em. They were—they were ugly! Eh?"

"That's so," said Mrs. Candee.

"Don't you think they were ugly?"

"Yes, I think that's so," said Mrs. Candee, as she settled down to meditate upon the new laundress who was coming to-morrow.

Next morning Candee rushed into his shop, omitted the report on his Sunday golf and the progress of his game which he usually gave to Miss Cogerty, and dashed at the shelf of toys. He had never thought about toys as he had about personal Christmas cards or diaries. His only specialty for children was expensive juveniles.

He glowered at the shelf. It was disordered. It was characterless. There were one rabbit of gray Canton flannel, two rabbits of papier-mâché, and nine tubercular rabbits of white fur. There were sixteen dolls which simpered and looked unintelligent. There were one train, one fire engine, and a device for hoisting thimblefuls of sand upon a trestle. Not that you did anything with it when you had hoisted it.

"Huh!" said Candee.

"Yes, Mr. Candee?" said Miss Cogerty.

"Looks like a side-street notions store. Looks like a racket shop. Looks like a—looks like— Aah!" said Candee.

He stormed his desk like a battalion of marines. He was stern. "Got to take up that bum shipment with the Fressen

Paper Company. I'll write 'em a letter that'll take their hides off. I won't type it. Make it stronger if I turn the ole pen loose."

He vigorously cleared away a pile of fancy penwipers—stopping only to read the advertisement on an insurance blotter, to draw one or two pictures on an envelope, and to rub the enticing pale-blue back of a box of safety matches with a soft pencil till it looked silvery in a cross-light. He snatched his fountain pen out of his vest pocket. He looked at it unrelentingly. He sharpened the end of a match and scraped a clot of ink off the pen cap. He tried the ink supply by making a line of O's on his thumb-nail. He straightened up, looked reprovingly at Miss Cogerty's back, slapped a sheet of paper on the desk—then stopped again and read his mail.

It did not take him more than an hour to begin to write the letter he was writing. In grim jet letters he scrawled:

FRESSEN COMPANY:

GENTLEMEN,—I want you to thoroughly understand—

Twenty minutes later he had added nothing to the letter but a curlicue on the tail of the "d" in "understand." He was drawing the picture of a wooden doll with a pointed hat and a flaring black beard. His eyes were abstracted and his lips moved furiously:

"Makes me sick. Not such a whale 'of a big shop, but it's distinctive. Not all this commonplace junk—souvenirs and bum valentines. And yet our toys— Ordinary! Common! Hate to think what people must have been saying about 'em! But those wooden dolls out there in the country—they were ugly, just like Nelly said, but somehow they kind of stirred up the imagination."

He shook his head, rubbed his temples, looked up wearily. He saw that the morning rush had begun. He went out into the shop slowly, but as he crooned at Mrs. Harry McPherson, "I have some new light-weight English envelopes—crossbar lavender with a

stunning purple lining," he was imperturbable. He went out to lunch with Harry Jason and told a really new flivver story. He did not cease his bustling again till four, when the shop was for a moment still. Then he leaned against the counter and brooded:

"Those wooden dolls remind me of—Darn it! I don't know what they do remind me of! Like something—Castles. Gypsies. Oh, rats! Brother Candee, I thought you'd grown up! Hey, Miss Cogerty, what trying do? Don't put those Honey Bunny books there!"

At home he hurried through dinner.

"Shall we play a little auction with the Darbins?" Mrs. Candee yawned.

"No. I— Got to mull over some business plans. Think I'll take a drive by myself, unless you or the girls have to use the machine," ventured Candee.

"No. I think I might catch up on my sleep. Oh, Jimmy, the new laundress drinks just as much coffee as the last one did!"

"Yes?" said Candee, looking fixedly at a candle shade and meditating. "I don't know. Funny, all the wild crazy plans I used to have when I was a kid. Suppose those dolls remind me of that."

He dashed out from dinner, hastily started the car. He drove rapidly past the lakes, through dwindling lines of speculative houses, into a world of hazelnut brush and small boys with furtive dogs. His destination was the tarpaper shack in front of which he had seen the wooden dolls.

He stopped with a squawk of brakes, hustled up the path to the wild-grape arbor. In the dimness beneath it, squatting on his heels beside a bicycle, was a man all ivory and ebony, ghost white and outlandish black. His cheeks and veined forehead were pale, his beard was black and thin and square. Only his hands were ruddy. They were brick-red and thick, yet cunning was in them, and the fingers tapered to square ends. He was a mediæval monk in overalls, a Hindu indecently without his turban.

As Candee charged upon him he looked up and mourned:

"The chain, she rusty."

Now Candee was the friendliest soul in all the Boosters' Club. Squatting, he sympathized:

"Rusty, eh? Ole chain kind of rusty! Hard luck, I'll say. Ought to use graphite on it. That's it—graphite. 'Member when I was a kid—"

"I use graphite. All rusty before I get him," the ghost lamented. His was a deep voice, and humorless and grave.

Candee was impressed. "Hard luck! How about boric acid? No, that isn't it—chloric acid. No, oxalic acid. That's it—oxalic! That 'll take off the rust."

"Os-all-ic," murmured the ghost.

"Well, cheer up, old man. Some day you'll be driving your own boat."

"Oh! Say!"—the ghost was childishly proud—"I got a phonograph!"

"Have you? Slick!" Candee became cautious and inquisitive. He rose and, though actually he had not touched the bicycle, he dusted off his hands. Craftily: "Well, I guess you make pretty good money, at that. I was noticing—"

"Reason I turned in, I noticed you had some toys out front. Thought I might get one for the kids. What do you charge?" He was resolving belligerently, "I won't pay more than a dollar per."

"I sharge fifty cent."

Candee felt cheated. He had been ready to battle for his rights and it was disconcerting to waste all this energy. The ghost rose, in sections, and ambled toward the glass case of dolls. He was tall, fantastically tall as his own toy emperors, and his blue-denim jacket was thick with garden soil. Beside him Candee was rosy and stubby and distressingly neat. He was also uneasy. Here was a person to whom he couldn't talk naturally.

"So you make dolls, eh? Didn't know there was a toy maker in Vernon."

"No, I am nod a toy maker. I am a sculptor." The ghost was profoundly sad. "But nod de kine you t'ink. I do

not make chudges in plog hats to put on courthouses. I would lige to. I would make fine plog hats. But I am not recognize. I make epitaphs in de monooement works. Huh!" The ghost sounded human now, and full of guile. "I am de only man in dose monooement works dat know what 'R.I.P.' mean in de orizhinal Greek!"

He leaned against the gate and chuckled. Candee recovered from his feeling of being trapped in a particularly chilly tomb. He crowed:

"I'll bet you are, at that. But you must have a good time making these dolls."

"You lak dem?"

"You bet! I certainly do. I—" His enthusiasm stumbled. In a slightly astonished tone, in a low voice, he marveled, "And I do, too, by golly!" Then: "You— I guess you enjoy making—"

"No, no! It iss not enjoyment. Dey are my art, de dolls. Dey are how I get even wit' de monooement works. I should wish I could make him for a living, but nobody want him. One year now—always dey stand by de gate, waiting, and nobody buy one. Oh, well, I can't help dat! I know what I do, even if nobody else don't. I try to make him primitive, like what a child would make if he was a fine craftsman like me. Dey are all dream dolls. And me, I make him right. See! Nobody can break him!"

He snatched the Gothic princess from the case and banged her on the fence.

Candee came out of a trance of embarrassed unreality and shouted: "Sure are the real stuff. Now, uh, the—uh—May I ask your name?"

"Emile Jumas my name."

Candee snapped his fingers. "Got it, by golly!"

"Pardon?"

"The Papa Jumas dolls! That's their name. Look here! Have you got any more of these in the house?"

"Maybe fifty." Jumas had been roused out of his ghostliness.

"Great! Could you make five or six

a day, if you didn't do anything else and maybe had a boy to help you?"

"Oh yez. No. Well, maybe four."

"See here. I could— I have a little place where I think maybe I could sell a few. Course you understand I don't know for sure. Taking a chance. But I think maybe I could. I'm J. T. Candee. Probably you know my stationery shop. I don't want to boast, but I will say there's no place in town that touches it for class. But I don't mean I could afford to pay you any fortune. But"—all his caution collapsed—"Jumas, I'm going to put you across!"

The two men shook hands a number of times and made sounds of enthusiasm, sounds like the rubbing of clothes on a washboard. But Jumas was stately in his invitation:

"Will you be so good and step in to have a leetle homemade wine?"

It was one room, his house, with a loft above, but it contained a harp, a double bed, a stove, a hen that was doubtful of strangers, a substantial Mamma Jumas, six children, and forty-two wooden dolls.

"Would you like to give up the monument works and stick to making these?" glowed Candee, as he handled the dolls.

Jumas mooned at him. "Oh yez."

Ten minutes later, at the gate, Candee sputtered: "By golly! by golly! Certainly am pitching wild to-night. Not safe to be out alone. For first time in my life forgot to mention prices. Crazy as a kid—and I like it!" But he tried to sound managerial as he returned. "What do you think I ought to pay you apiece?"

Craftily Papa Jumas piped: "I t'ink you sell him for more than fifty cent. I t'ink maybe I ought to get fifty."

Then, while the proprietor of the Novelty Stationery Shop wrung spiritual hands and begged him to be careful, Candee the adventurer cried: "Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to sell 'em at three dollars, and I'm going to make every swell on the Boulevard buy one, and I'm going to make 'em

pay their three bones, and I'm going to make 'em like it! Yes, sir! And you get two dollars apiece!"

It was not till he was on the sleeping porch, with the virile gray blanket patted down about his neck, that Candee groaned: "What have I let myself in for? And are they ugly or not?" He desired to go in, wake his wife, and ask her opinion. He lay and worried, and when he awoke at dawn and discovered that he hadn't really been tragically awake all night, he was rather indignant.

But he was exhilarated at breakfast and let Junior talk all through his oatmeal.

He came into the shop with a roar. "Miss Cogerty! Get the porter and have him take all those toys down to that racket shop on Jerusalem Alley that bought our candlestick remainders. Go down and get what you can for 'em. We're going to have— Miss Cogerty, we're going to display in this shop a line of arts-and-crafts dolls that for artistic execution and delightful quaintness— Say, that's good stuff for an ad. I'll put a ten-inch announcement in the *Courier*. I'll give this town one jolt. You wait!"

Candee did not forever retain his enthusiasm for Papa Jumas dolls. Nor did they revolutionize the nurseries of Vernon. To be exact, some people liked them and some people did not like them. Enough were sold to keep Jumas occupied, and not enough so that at the great annual crisis of the summer motor trip to Michigan, Candee could afford a nickel-plated spotlight as well as slip covers. There was a reasonable holiday sale through the autumn following, and always Candee liked to see them on the shelf at the back of the shop—the mediæval dolls like cathedral grotesques, the Greek warrior Demetrios, and the modern dolls—the agitated traffic policeman and the aviator whose arms were wings. Candee and Junior played explorer with them on the sleeping porch, and with them populated a castle made of chairs.

But in the spring he discovered Miss Arnold's batik lamp shades.

Miss Arnold was young, Miss Arnold was pretty, and her lamp shades had many "talking points" for a salesman with enthusiasm. They were terra-cotta and crocus and leaf green; they had flowers, fruit, panels, fish, and whirligigs upon them, and a few original decorations which may have been nothing but spots. Candee knew that they were either artistic or insane; he was excited, and in the first week he sold forty of them and forgot the Papa Jumas dolls.

In late April a new road salesman came in from the Mammoth Doll Corporation. He took Candee out to lunch and was secretive and oozed hints about making a great deal of money. He admitted at last that the Mammoth people were going to put on the market a doll that "had everything else beat four ways from the ace." He produced a Skillyoolly doll. She was a simpering, star-eyed, fluffy, chiffon-clothed lady doll, and, though she was cheaply made, she was not cheaply priced.

"The Skillyoolly drive is going to be the peppiest campaign you ever saw. There's a double market—not only the kids, but all these Janes that like to stick a doll up on the piano, to make the room look dressy when Bill comes calling. And it's got the snap, eh?"

"Why don't you—? The department stores can sell more of these than I can," Candee fenced.

"That's just what we don't want to do. There's several of these fluff dolls on the market—not that any of them have the zip of our goods, of course. What we want is exclusive shops, that don't handle any other dolls whatever, so we won't have any inside competition, and so we can charge a class price."

"But I'm already handling some dolls—"

"If I can show you where you can triple your doll turnover, I guess we can take care of that, eh? For one thing, we're willing to make the most generous on-sale proposition you ever hit."

The salesman left with Candee samples of the Skillyoolly dolls, and a blank contract. He would be back in this territory next month, he indicated, and he hoped to close the deal. He gave Candee two cigars and crooned:

"Absolutely all we want is to have you handle the Skillyoolly exclusively and give us a chance to show what we can do. 'You tell 'em, pencil, you got the point!'"

Candee took the dolls home to his wife, and now she was not merely wifely and plump and compliant. She squealed.

"I think they're perfectly darling! So huggable—just sweet. I know you could sell thousands of them a year. You must take them. I always thought the Jumas dolls were hideous."

"They aren't so darn hideous. Just kind of different," Candee said, uncomfortably.

Next morning he had decided to take the Skillyoolly agency—and he was as lonely and unhappy about it as a boy who has determined to run away from home.

Papa Jumas came in that day and Candee tried to be jolly and superior.

"Ah there, old monsieur! Say, I may fix up an arrangement to switch your dolls from my place to the Toy and China Bazaar."

Jumas lamented: "De Bazaar iss a cheap place. I do not t'ink they lige my t'ings."

"Well, we'll see, we'll see. Excuse me now. Got to speak to Miss Cogerty about—about morocco cardcases—cardcases."

He consulted Miss Cogerty and the lovely Miss Arnold of the batik lamp shades about the Skillyoolly dolls. Both of them squeaked ecstatically. Yet Candee scowled at a Skillyoolly standing on his desk and addressed her:

"Doll, you're a bunch of fluff. You may put it over these sentimental females for a while, but you're no good. You're a rotten fake, and to charge two plunks for you is the darndest nerve I ever heard of. And yet I might make a

thousand a year clear out of you. A thousand a year. Buy quite a few cord tires, curse it!"

At five Miss Sorrell bought some correspondence cards.

Candee was afraid of Miss Sorrell. She was the principal of a private school. He never remembered what she wore, but he had an impression that she was clad entirely in well-starched four-ply linen collars. She was not a person to whom you could sell things. She looked at you sarcastically and told you what she wanted. But the girls in her school were fervid customers, and, though he grumbled, "Here's that old grouch," he concentrated upon her across the showcase.

When she had ordered the correspondence cards and fished the copper address plate out of a relentless seal purse, Miss Sorrell blurted: "I want to tell you how very, very much I appreciate the Papa Jumas dolls. They are the only toys sold in Vernon that have imagination and solidity."

"Folks don't care much for them, mostly. They think I ought to carry some of these fluffy dolls."

"Parents may not appreciate them, and I suppose they're so original that children take a little time getting used to them. But my nephew loves his Jumas dolls dearly; he takes them to bed with him. We are your debtors for having introduced them."

As she dotted out, Candee was vowing: "I'm not going to have any of those Skillyoolly hussies in my place! I'm—I'll fight for the Jumas dolls! I'll make people like 'em, if it takes a leg. I don't care if I lose a thousand a year on them, or ten thousand, or ten thousand million tillion!"

It was too lofty to last. He reflected that he didn't like Miss Sorrell. She had a nerve to try to patronize him! He hastened to his desk. He made computations for half an hour. Candee was an irregular and temperamental cost accountant. If his general profit was sufficient he rarely tracked down the



"JUMAS, I'M GOING TO PUT YOU ACROSS!"

share produced by items. Now he found that, allowing for rent, overhead, and interest, his profit on Papa Jumas dolls in the last four months had been four dollars. He gasped:

"Probably could make 'em popular if I took time enough. But—four dollars! And losing a thousand a year by not handling Skillyoollys. I can't afford luxuries like that. I'm not in business for my health. I've got a wife and kids to look out for. Still, I'm making enough to keep fat and cheery on, entirely aside from the dolls. Family don't seem to be starving. I guess I can afford one luxury. I— Oh, rats!"

He reached, in fact, a sure, clear, ringing resolution that he would stock Skillyoolly dolls; that he'd be hanged if he'd stock Skillyoolly dolls; and that he would give nine dollars and forty cents if he knew whether he was going to stock them or not.

After the girls had gone out that evening he hinted to his wife: "I don't really believe I want to give up the Jumas dolls. May cost me a little profit for a while yet, but I kind of feel obli-

gated to the poor old Frenchie, and the really wise birds—you take this Miss Sorrell, for instance—they appreciate—"

"Then you can't handle the Skillyoolly dolls?"

"Don't use that word! Skillyoolly! Ugh! Sounds like an old maid tickling a baby!"

"Now that's all very well, to be so superior and all—and if you mean that I was an old maid when we were married—"

"Why, Nelly, such a thought nev' entered my head!"

"Well, how could I tell? You're so bound and determined to be arbitrary to-night. It's all very well to be charitable and to think about that Jumas—and I never did like him, horrid, skinny old man!—and about your dolls that you're so proud of, and I still insist they're ugly, but I do think there's some folks a little nearer home that you got to show consideration for, and us going without things we need—"

"Now I guess you've got about as many clothes as anybody—"

"See here, Jimmy Candee! I'm not

complaining about myself. I like pretty clothes, but I never was one to demand things for myself, and you know it!"

"Yes, that's true. You're sensible—"

"Well, I try to be, anyway, and I detest these wives that simply drive their husbands like they were pack-horses, but— It's the girls. Not that they're bad off. But you're like all these other men. You think because a girl has a new dancing frock once a year that she's got everything in the world. And here's Mamie crying her eyes out because she hasn't got anything to wear to the Black Bass dance, and that horrible Jason girl will show up in silver brocade or something, and Mamie thinks Win Morgan won't even look at her. Not but what she can get along. I'm not going to let you work and slave for things to put on Mamie's back. But if you're going to waste a lot of money I certainly don't see why it should go to a perfect stranger—a horrid old Frenchman that digs graves, or whatever it is—when we could use it right here at home!"

"Well, of course, looking at it that way—" sighed Candee.

"Do you see?"

"Yes, but—there's a principle involved. Don't know that I can make it clear to you, but I wouldn't feel as if I was doing my job honestly if I sold a lot of rubbish."

"Rubbish? Rubbish? If there's any rubbish it isn't those darling Skillyoolly dolls, but those wretched, angular Jumas things! But if you've made up your mind to be stubborn— And of course I'm not supposed to know anything about business! I merely scrimp and save and economize and do the marketing!"

She flapped the pages of her magazine and ignored him. All evening she was patient. It is hard to endure patience, and Candee was shaken. He was fond of his wife. Her refusal to support his shaky desire to "do his job honestly" left him forlorn, outside the door of her comfortable affection.

"Oh, I suppose I better be sensible," he said to himself, seventy or eighty times.

He was taking the Skillyoolly contract out of his desk as a cyclone entered the shop, a cyclone in brown velvet, white hair, and the best hat in Vernon—Mrs. Gerard Randall. Candee went rejoicing to the battle. He was a salesman. He was an artist, a scientist, and the harder the problem the better. Mechanically handing out quires of note-paper to customers who took whatever he suggested bored Candee as it would bore an exhibition aviator to drive a tractor. But selling to Mrs. Randall was not a bore. She was the eternal dowager, the dictator of Vernon society, rich and penurious and overwhelming.

He beamed upon her. He treacherously looked mild. He seemed edified by her snort:

"I want a penholder for my desk that won't look like a beastly schoolroom pen."

"Then you want a quill pen in mauve or a sea-foam green." Mrs. Randall was going to buy a quill pen, or she was going to die—or he was.

"I certainly do not want a quill pen, either mauve or pea-green or sky-blue beige! Quill pens are an abomination, and they wiggle when you're writing, and they're disgustingly common."

"My pens don't wiggle. They have patent grips—"

"Nonsense!"

"Well, shall we look at some other kinds?"

He placidly laid out an atrocious penholder of mother-of-pearl and streaky brass which had infested the shop for years.

"Horrible! Victorian! Certainly not!"

He displayed a nickel penholder stamped, "Souvenir of Vernon," a brittle, red wooden holder with a cork grip, and a holder of chased silver, very bulgy and writhing.

"They're terrible!" wailed Mrs. Randall.



MISS ARNOLD'S LAMP SHADES HAD MANY "TALKING POINTS"

She sounded defenseless. He flashed before her eyes the best quill in the shop, crisp, firm, tinted a faint rose.

"Well," she said, feebly. She held it, wobbled it, wrote a sentence in the agitated air. "But it wouldn't go with my desk set," she attempted.

He brought out a desk set of seal-brown enamel and in the bowl of shot he thrust the rose quill.

"How did you remember what my desk set was like?"

"Ah! Could one forget?" He did not look meek now; he looked insulting and cheerful.

"Oh, drat the man! I'll take it. But I don't want you to think for one mo-

ment that I'd stand being bullied this way if I weren't in a hurry."

He grinned. He resolved, "I'm going to make the ole dragon buy three Jumas dolls—no, six! Mrs. Randall, I know you're in a rush, but I want you to look at something that will interest you."

"I suppose you're going to tell me that 'we're finding this line very popular,' whatever it is. I don't want it."

"Quite the contrary. I want you to see these because they haven't gone well at all."

"Then why should I be interested?"

"Ah, Mrs. Randall, if Mrs. Randall were interested, everybody else would have to be."

"Stop being sarcastic, if you don't mind. That's my own province." She was glaring at him, but she was following him to the back of the shop.

He chirped: "I believe you buy your toys for your grandchildren at the Bazaar. But I want to show you something they'll really like." He was holding up a Gothic princess, turning her lanky magnificence round and round. As Mrs. Randall made an "aah" sound in her throat, he protested. "Wait! You're wrong. They're not ugly; they're a new kind of beauty."

"Beauty! Arty! Tea-roomy!"

"Not at all. Children love 'em. I'm so dead sure of it that I want— Let's see. You have three grandchildren. I want to send each of them two Papa Jumas dolls. I'll guarantee— No. Wait! I'll guarantee the children won't care for them at first. Don't say anything about the dolls, but just leave 'em around the nursery and watch. Inside of two weeks you'll find the children so crazy about 'em they won't go to bed without 'em. I'll send 'em up to your daughter's house and when you get around to it you can decide whether you want to pay me or not."

"Humph! You are very eloquent. But I can't stand here all day. Ask one of your young women to wrap up four

or five of these things and put them in my car. And put them on my bill. I can't be bothered with trying to remember to pay you. Good day!"

While he sat basking at his desk he remembered the words of the severe schoolmistress, Miss Sorrell, "Only toys in Vernon that have imagination and solidity."

"People like that, with brains, they're the kind. I'm not going to be a popcorn-and-lemonade seller. Skillyoolly dolls! Any ten-year-old boy could introduce those to a lot of sentimental females. Takes a real salesman to talk Jumas dolls. And— If I could only get Nelly to understand!"

Alternately triumphant and melancholy, he put on his hat, trying the effect in the little crooked mirror over the water cooler, and went out to the Boosters' Club weekly lunch.

Sometimes the Boosters' lunches were given over to speeches; sometimes they were merry and noisy; and when they were noisy Candee was the noisiest. But he was silent to-day. He sat at the long table beside Darbin, the ice-cream manufacturer, and when Darbin chuckled invitingly, "Well, you old Bolshevik, what's the latest junk you're robbing folks for?" Candee's answer was feeble.



SHE WAS A SIMPERING, STAR-EYED, CHIFFON-CLOTHED LADY



HE STARED AT THE TWO DOLLS

"That's all right, now! 'S good stuff."

He looked down the line of the Boosters—men engaged in electrotyping and roofing, real estate and cigar making; certified accountants and teachers and city officials. He noted Oscar Sunderquist, the young surgeon.

He considered: "I suppose they're all going through the same thing—quick turnover on junk *versus* building up something permanent, and maybe taking a loss; anyway, taking a chance. Huh! Sounds so darn ridiculously easy when you put it that way. Of course a regular fellow would build up the long-time trade and kick out cheap stuff. Only—not so easy to chase away a thousand or ten thousand dollars when it comes right up and tags you. Oh, gee! I dunno! I wish you'd quit fussing like a schoolgirl, Brother Candee. I'm going to cut it out." By way of illustrating which he turned to his friend Darbin. "Frank, I'm worried. I want some advice. Will it bother you if I weep on your shoulder?"

"Go to it! Shoot! Anything I can do—"

He tried to make clear to Darbin how involved was a choice between Papa Jumas and the scent pots of the Skilly-ooley. Darbin interrupted:

"Is that all that ails you? Cat's

sake! What the deuce difference does it make which kind of dolls you handle? Of course you'll pick the kind that brings in the most money. I certainly wouldn't worry about the old Frenchman. I always did think those Jumas biznai were kind of freakish."

"Then you don't think it matters?"

"Why, certainly not! Jimmy, you're a good business man, some ways. You're a hustler. But you always were erratic. Business isn't any jazz-band dance. You got to look at these things in a practical way. Say, come on; the president's going to make a spiel. Kid him along and get him going."

"Don't feel much like kidding."

"I'll tell you what I think's the matter with you, Jimmy; your liver's on the bum."

"Maybe you're right," croaked Candee. He did not hear the president's announcement of the coming clam-bake. He was muttering, in an injured way: "Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!"

He was walking back to the shop.

He didn't want to go back; he didn't care whether Miss Cogerty was selling any of the *écrasé* sewing baskets or not. He was repeating Darbin's disgusted: "What difference does it make? Why all the fuss?"

"At most I'd lose a thousand a year. I wouldn't starve. This little decision—nobody cares a hang. I was a fool to speak to Nelly and Darbin. Now they'll be watching me. Well, I'm not going to let 'em think I'm an erratic fool. Ten words of approval from a crank like that Sorrell woman is a pretty thin return for years of work. Yes, I'll—I'll be sensible."

He spent the late afternoon in furiously re-arranging the table of vases and candlesticks. "Exercise, that's what I need, not all this grousing around," he said. But when he went home he had, without ever officially admitting it to himself that he was doing it, thrust a Jumas doll and a Skillyoolly into his pocket, and these, in the absence of his wife, he hid beneath his bed on the sleeping porch. With his wife he had a strenuous and entirely imaginary conversation:

"Why did I bring them home? Because I wanted to. I don't see any need of explaining my motives. I don't intend to argue about this in any way, shape, manner, or form!" He looked at himself in the mirror, with admiration for the firmness, strength of character, iron will, and numerous other virtues revealed in his broad nose and square—also plump—chin. It is true that his wife came in and caught him at it, and that he pretended to be examining his bald spot. It is true that he listened

mildly to her reminder that for two weeks now he hadn't rubbed any of the sulphur stuff on his head. But he marched downstairs—behind her—with an imperial tread. He had solved his worry! Somehow, he was going to work it all out.

Just how he was going to work it out

he did not state. That detail might be left till after dinner.

He did not again think of the dolls hidden beneath his bed till he had dived under the blanket. Cursing a little, he crawled out and set them on the rail of the sleeping porch.

He awoke, suddenly and sharply, at sunrise. He heard a voice—surely not his own—snarling: "Nobody is going to help you. If you want to go on looking for a magic way out—go right on looking. You won't find it!"

He stared at the two dolls. The first sunlight was on the Skillyoolly object, and in that intolerant glare he saw that her fluffy dress was sewed on with cheap thread which would break at the first rough handling. Suddenly he was out of bed, pounding the unfortunate Skillyoolly on the rail, smashing her simpering face, wrenching apart her ill-jointed limbs, tearing her gay chiffon. He was dashing into the bedroom, waking his bewildered wife with:

"Nelly! Nelly! Get up! No, it's all right. But it's time for breakfast."

She foggily looked at her wrist watch



W. MOORE

"BESIDES," HE SHOUTED, "HOW DO WE KNOW THE SKILLYOOLYS WOULD SELL?"

on the bedside table, and complained, "Why, it isn't but six o'clock!"

"I know it, but we're going to do a stunt. D'you realize we haven't had breakfast just by ourselves and had a chance to really talk since last summer? Come on! You fry an egg and I'll start the percolator. Come on!"

"Well," patiently, reaching for her dressing gown.

While Candee, his shrunken bathrobe flapping about his shins, excitedly put the percolator together and attached it to the baseboard plug, leaving out nothing but the coffee, he chattered of the Boosters' Club.

As they sat down he crowed: "Nelly, we're going to throw some gas in the ole car and run down to Chicago and back, next week. How's that?"

"That would be very nice," agreed Mrs. Candee.

"And we're going to start reading aloud again, evenings, instead of all this doggone double solitaire."

"That would be fine."

"Oh, and by the way, I've finally made up my mind. I'm not going to mess up my store with that Skillyoolly stuff. Going to keep on with the Jumas dolls, but push 'em harder."

"Well, if you really think—"

"And, uh— Gee! I certainly feel great this morning. Feel like a million dollars. What say we have another fried egg?"

"I think that might be nice," said Mrs. Candee, who had been married for nineteen years.

"Sure you don't mind about the Skillyoolly dolls?"

"Why, no, not if you know what you

want. And that reminds me! How terrible of me to forget! When you ran over to the Jasons' last evening, the Skillyoolly salesman telephoned the house—he'd just come to town. He asked me if you were going to take the agency, and I told him no. Of course I've known all along that you weren't. But hasn't it been interesting, thinking it all out? I'm so glad you've been firm."

"Well, when I've gone into a thing thoroughly I like to smash it right through. . . . Now you take Frank Darbin; makes me tired the way he's fussing and stewing, trying to find out whether he wants to buy a house in Rosebank or not. So you—you told the Skillyoolly salesman no? I just wonder— Gee! I kind of hate to give up the chance of the Skillyoolly market! What do you think?"

"But it's all settled now."

"Then I suppose there's no use fussing— I tell you; I mean a fellow wants to look at a business deal from all sides. See how I mean?"

"That's so," said Mrs. Candee, admiringly. As with a commanding step he went to the kitchen to procure another fried egg she sighed to herself, "Such a dear boy—and yet such a forceful man."

Candee ran in from the kitchen. In one hand was an egg, in the other the small frying-pan. "Besides," he shouted, "how do we know the Skillyoollys would necessarily sell so darn well? You got to take everything like that into consideration, and then decide and stick to it. See how I mean?"

"That's so," said Mrs. Candee.